



Spill for fish withheld because of drought

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Bonneville Power Administration

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PORTLAND, Ore. – Federal agencies will not initiate the planned release of water through spillways at dams to assist juvenile salmon in their spring migration to the sea, the Bonneville Power Administration said today.

"This was a very painful, difficult decision, but the drought has so depleted water supplies that the reliability of the region's electricity system is in peril," said Steve Wright, acting BPA administrator.

The hydro system will be operated without spill for at least two weeks under emergency provisions of the biological opinion that prescribes actions to save endangered stocks of salmon.

In an operational plan to be released April 13, the federal agencies will describe what levels of spill may be available for spring and summer migrants over the April-August period. Water saved by not spilling is sufficient to generate 1,000 megawatts – enough to serve a city the size of Seattle.

In an independent analysis, the four-state Northwest Power Planning Council has determined that the region will be short of electricity this spring and fall unless steps are taken immediately to both reduce demand and conserve water in the Columbia River.

"The Northwest faces one of the driest years in over 70 years of record," said Wright. "Current estimates are that natural stream flow at The Dalles will be roughly half of average. Spilling water now will worsen the shortage and drive electricity prices up even higher."

Meanwhile, the steps are being taken to reduce electrical demand. For example, BPA is paying farmers not to irrigate, thereby avoiding use of electricity for pumping.

The National Marine Fisheries Service has studied the benefits of spilling juvenile fish over dams in this water year. The analysis indicates that not spilling decreases survival by 0-15 percent, depending on the stocks in question and the proportion that can be transported by barge and truck. For Snake River stocks, which can be transported in high numbers, the additional mortality is only 0-2 percent.

Federal agencies collaborating on river operations include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation, both operators of dams; the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service, both responsible for recovery measures under the Endangered Species Act; and the

Environmental Protection Agency, responsible for water quality.

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